

BOOK REVIEW: AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE: A HISTORY OF SEEING

David A. Goss, O.D., Ph.D.

Emeritus Professor of Optometry,
Indiana University

dgoss@indiana.edu

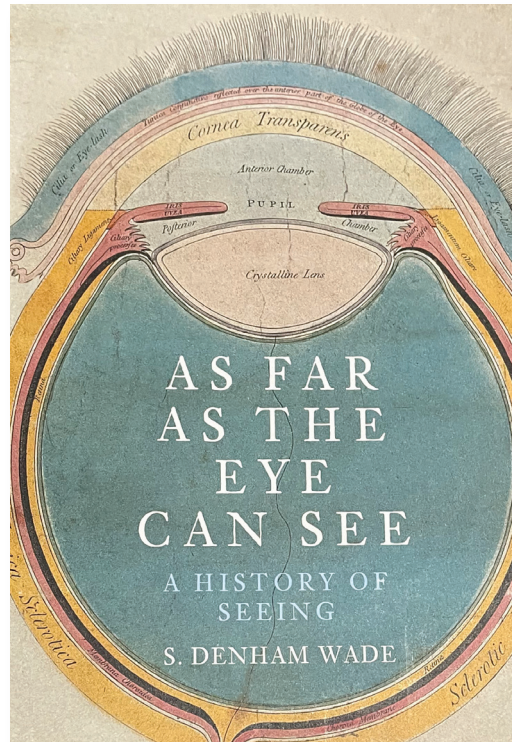
10.14434/hindsight.v54i2.37221

This book offers a collection of anecdotes and facts concerning the history and impact on us and our world of various discoveries and technologies involving vision. After a chapter on the evolution of eyes, the creations that are considered are firelight, art, mirrors, writing, spectacles, the printing press, telescopes, industrialized light, photography, moving images, and smartphones.

In the chapter on spectacles the author of course noted that their invention made it possible for persons with presbyopia to continue to be able to do work at close distances. She also discussed how there was greater interest in observation in the years following the invention of spectacles, along with increased representation of subtle details of faces and emotions in art. An interesting anecdote about the increased availability of books coming from the invention of the printing press was that reading became more often an individual activity as opposed to the entertainment of listening to a book being read out loud to a group.

The author observes that while smartphones are a great convenience and ready source of information, they "have enslaved our eyes like nothing before them." Further, it is troubling that there have been great increases in depression and self-harm among young people in the years that smartphones and social media have become popular.

With each new way of seeing the world, there have been substantial changes in the way humans spend their time, interact with each other, and think of themselves. And with each new invention, vision became more dominant over other senses. Many of the inventions also emphasized more solitary pursuits. Although the ascendance of vision as the strongly dominant sense may make sense to us as eye and vision care practitioners,



As Far as the Eye Can See: A History of Seeing. Susan Denham Wade. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2019. ISBN-13: 978-0-7509-8703-5. 304 pages. Hardcover.

the author points out how much has been lost through the diminution of the use of hearing, smell, and touch. The closing advice offered by the author is to exercise "some caution" in future use of visual technologies and "take care of those precious, precious eyes. Switch off our screens and go outside... and do more talking, touching, tasting and smelling every day."

The book is recommended for its interesting perspectives on visual technologies and their consequences. The author has degrees in creative writing, economics, law, and business. Her LinkedIn page describes her as an "author (non-fiction), editor, writer, strategic advisor," and an "experienced strategy and management consultant with particular expertise in the creative, visual media and digital communications industries."